POLITICAL OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

POPULATION of COUNTRIES.

Istius modi res dicere ornatè velle, purile est, planè autem & perspicuè expedire posse, docti & intelligentis viri. Cic. de Fin. l. 3.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE ſtate of population in England has of late been the ſubject of much enquiry and diſcuſſion, in which the moſt oppoſite facts have been ſtated, and the moſt contradictory concluſions zealouſly ſupported. As this field of enquiry is very extenſive, and the means of accurate information very ſcanty, there is no probability of the controverſy being very ſoon ended, eſpecially as all the parties ſeem to conſider it as a matter

of

of the higheſt national importance, and to purſue it with a proportionable degree of zeal. One reverend gentleman * in particular has engaged in it with the warmth of a polemic divine, ſupporting ſome favorite dogma, rather than with the candor and impartiality which become a political enquirer, ſeeking for truth. Zeal, as far as it promotes induſtry is certainly very commendable, but when it produces warmth and intemperance in argument, it muſt neceſſarily be detrimental to the cauſe of truth, however it may ſerve to ſhew the patriotiſm and ſpirit of the writer. Now as truth is, or ought to be, the ſole object of all political enquiry, I have endeavoured to moderate the zeal of the controvertiſts, by ſhewing

* Mr. Howlet.

them

them, that the ſubject in diſpute is not of that momentous importance, which they ſeem to imagine, and that they may without any imputation on their zeal for the public good, continue their inveſtigations with the temper and coolneſs of ſpeculative philoſophers. For this purpoſe I have in as few words as poſſible examined the principal cauſes and effects of different degrees of population, in doing which I have not purſued the regular method of firſt ſtating the cauſes, and then deducing the conſequences, but have ſtated both in ſuch order as they ſeemed to me moſt likely to explain and corroborate each other. Method in argument ought only to be conſidered as the means of brevity and perſpicuity, which in enquiries of this kind muſt neceſſarily go together. A long and ſyſtematical arrangement of facts,

facts, comments, and illuſtrations, from which concluſions are afterwards to be drawn, may ſerve to ſhew the labour and ingenuity of the writer, but not to inform the generality of readers, who, if the premiſes are remote from the concluſions, loſe ſight of the one before they come to the other.

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THE political greatneſs of a nation conſiſts in the force which it is able to exert againſt any other nation; and this force will be in proportion to its ſuperfluous produce; that is to the quantities of the neceſſaries, or luxuries of life, produced by the labour of the inhabitants over and above what they themſelves conſume; for fleets and armies are only exertions of the ſuperfluous labour of a country, and the conſumption of its ſuperfluous produce. Where there is a ſuperfluous produce, there will of courſe be ſuperfluous labour, for wealth will always command mercenaries, either foreign or domeſtic, who will be employed inprivatel uxury and oſtentation, if not in public ſervice.

Every man who by his labour or ingenuity does not add as much to the national produce, as he conſumes, is a burden inſtead of a ſupport to the community. Every man who adds exactly as much to the national produce, as he takes from it, or in other words, merely maintains himſelf, neither increaſes or diminiſhes the public ſtrength. But every man who by his induſtry produces more than he conſumes, adds to the public ſtrength in proportion to the quantity of that ſuperfluous production.

Of the firſt claſs are all perſons maintained by public or private charities, the pageants of pomp and luxury, and in general all who are not employed in trade, agriculture, or the neceſſary ſervice of the ſtate; the means of whoſe ſubſiſtance would maintain a proportionable number of ſoldiers or ſeamen. Of the ſecond claſs there can be none in a country, where the neceſſaries of life are taxed; for as all taxes fall ultimately upon the conſumers, every one who conſumes the mere produce of his labour, pays from that produce the taxes, which are upon the articles which he conſumes,

and thereby contributes to the public ſervice. Of the third claſs, are all the uſeful inhabitants of every ſtate, the numbers of which are not ſo important as their induſtry and ingenuity; for if one huſbandman or manufacturer can, by the method of his work, or perfection of his machines, produce as much as ten, he contributes more to the ſtrength of the nation than ten would, for while he produces the ſame, he conſumes much leſs; and the ſuperfluous production which may be employed againſt a foreign country, is thereby encreaſed. We ſhall find through the whole courſe of hiſtory, that the greateſt armaments have been equipped and maintained, not by the moſt extenſive and populous countries, but by the moſt frugal and induſtrious.—Not by thoſe whoſe productions were greateſt, but by thoſe whoſe productions moſt exceeded their own neceſſary conſumption. Rome at the time of her greateſt ſtrength and vigour,* had never more than 300,000

* This I look upon to be the period immediately proceeding the ſecond Punic War.

citizens* capable of bearing arms, and yet for ſixteen years together during the ſecond Punic War, ſhe was enabled by induſtry and frugality to maintain a ſtanding army of more than half that number of their own citizens, beſides auxiliaries, which generally compoſed near half her armies†.

This was however the effect of very ſingular manners and inſtitutions, and what are rarely or ever united, extreme induſtry and extreme frugality. But we have a later inſtance in France, of an immenſe power produced by arts and induſtry only. In the year 1494 the expedition of Charles VIII. againſt the kingdom of Naples, though it conſiſted of leſs than 30,000 men, and was accompliſhed in one year, impoveriſhed and diſtreſſed the whole kingdom of France‡. Two centuries afterwards, Lewis XIV. raiſed and maintained, during ſeveral years, forces to the amount of 400,000; and yet it is generally agreed that France was much more populous at the end

* Liv. Epitome. l. 20.

† She had nearly this number after the battle of Cannæ though weakened by four ſucceſſive defeats. Liv. l. 23.

‡ Guiciardini. l. 1. and 2.

of

of the fifteenth, than at the end of the ſeventeenth century*. Whence then aroſe this mighty increaſe of ſtrength but from the increaſe of arts and induſtry? in the time of Charles VIII. the French were idle and ignorant, and the produce of their country merely maintained its inhabitants; ſo that when a very ſmall part of that produce was taken from them, to be employed abroad, they felt the greateſt diſtreſs. But in the time of Lewis XIV. their ſkill and induſtry in all kinds of productive labour, having added immenſely to the national produce, and the decreaſe of population having decreaſed the conſumption, they became poſſeſt of a vaſt ſuperfluity, which not only ſupplied the demands of increaſing

* M. d'Amaville makes the number of inhabitants in France to have decreaſed one fifth from the beginning of the 17th, to the middle of the 18th century, notwithſtanding its great addition of territory. This decreaſe muſt have been ſtill more rapid during the 16th century, from the ruinous and exhauſting wars of Italy which occupied the reigns of Lewis XII. and Francis I. And the ſtill more deſtructive civil wars and religious maſſacres under Henry II. and his three ſons. See Encyc. Art. Popul. The author of the Recherches, &c. has endeavourded to controvert this opinion, but his eſtimates are very partial and uncertain. The general appearance of France ſhews a diminiſhed population.

luxury,

luxury, but the more extenſive waſte of long and diſaſterous wars.

Had the increaſe of produce been the effect of an increaſe in the numbers, and not in the ſkill and induſtry of the inhabitants, it would have added nothing to the power of the nation; becauſe the conſumption would have increaſed with it, and the ſuperfluity remained the ſame.

In the dominions of the King of Naples there are at leaſt half a million of people maintained in idleneſs by the charities of the Convents, &c. The maintainance of theſe beggars, who add nothing to the national ſtrength, conſumes that ſuperfluous produce of the labour of the induſtrious, which might otherwiſe be imployed in a naval or military force. By ſeizing the revenues of the church, by which they are ſupported, the King of Naples might probably have a ſtanding army of 200,000 regulars. The 50,000 beggars would thus be changed into 200,000 ſoldiers; by which the population of the kingdom would be leſs by 300,000, but its power, and political conſequence would be immenſely greater.

This change has actually taken place in Sileſia.

Sileſia. When the King of Pruſſia took poſſeſſion of that country, he ſezied a great part of the church lands, and laid a tax of ten ſhillings in the pound on the reſt. He has by this means conſiderably leſſened the numbers of the inhabitants; for monks and beggars are more cheaply maintained than ſoldiers.

The incloſing of commons and conſolidating of farms have been ſuppoſed to have produced effects nearly the ſame in England. It has been obſerved, that where commons have been encloſed, the ſame tract of land which was before interſperſed with cottages, each of which contained a family, has afterwards been thrown into one large farm with only one houſe upon it. The ſame has alſo been obſerved where the ſmall farms into which the country was formerly divided, are united and let to one tenant. I ſhall not contend for the juſtice or injuſtice of theſe obſervations, for whether the numbers of the people have been diminiſhed or increaſed, the cultivation of the land has been undoubtedly improved, and its produce augumented, and therefore the diminution of inhabitants, if it has taken

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place, is far from being an evil. On the contrary, the conſumption being decreaſed with the numbers of the conſumers, and the produce increaſed by the improvements of art and induſtry, the ſuperfluity which remains to be imployed againſt the enemies of the ſtate is greater.

Where men are free in the perſons and properties, there is no danger of depopulation ever becoming exceſſive. The primitive laws of nature are againſt it, which nothing but the ſevereſt reſtrictions, or abſolute want can prevent from taking their due courſe. Every country, if left to itſelf, will have as many inhabitants as it can maintain, and more than it has really occaſion for; the degree of population beſt adapted to political greatneſs being that, where the numbers are exactly proportioned to the quantity of productive employments, and the neceſſary demands of public ſervice. All above are an incumbrance. Even if there are not ſufficient for theſe purpoſes, more are always to be had, provided there be a ſufficient ſuperfluous produce. Wealth will always be the means of acquiring land forces; and the means by which wealth is

acquired,

acquired, will neceſſarily create a maritime power in a maritime ſtate. The objection againſt mercenary troops can be of no validity, when we conſider that the armies whoſe exertions have been the moſt ſteady and effective, who have borne proſperity with the greateſt temperance, and adverſity with the greateſt conſtancy, have been compoſed of mercenaries, and thoſe of the moſt deſperate kind, ſuch as outlaws and vagabonds of all nations and deſcriptions, who had every thing to hope and nothing to fear, Such were the men, who formerly compoſed the army of Hannibal,* and ſuch are thoſe who now compoſe a great part of that of the King of Pruſſia, both of which have given ſuch inſtances of bravery, conſtancy and fidelity, as are not to be equalled in any other period of hiſtory.

In countries where the number of inhabitants is ſmall, compared with the extent and fertility of the ſoil, and the conveniences and advantages of trade, labour will

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* Exercito non ſuo civili, ſed mixto ex colluvione omnium gentium, quibus non lex, non mos, non linqua communis, Liv. l. 28. c. 12.

neceſſarily be dear, and population as neceſſarily increaſe. The proſpect of gain will entice people from other countries, where the demands for labour, and of courſe its profits are leſs; and the great obſtacle to marriage, the difficulty of maintaining a numerous family, will be effectually removed.* This increaſe of population, unleſs checked by war, peſtilence or oppreſſion, will continue until the number of inhabitants becomes as great, as the power of maintaining and employing them will admit. When there is this full complement, and the annual conſumption is exactly equal to the annual production, every new exertion that is made, and every new tax that is impoſed, muſt decreaſe the number, or what is worſe make one part of them a burden to the reſt. All taxes are in fact ſo many deductions from the produce of labour, in which the real wealth of a nation conſiſts; for, ſuppoſing that the tax is immediately paid from the profits

* In America before the troubles, a family of young children were looked upon as a fortune, inſtead of an incumbrance, and a widow frequently got a huſband on that account. See Smith, W. of N.

fits of the merchant or manufacturer, its effects upon the country in general will be the ſame as if it was paid in the uſual way, by the conſumer of the articles taxed. The only difference is, that inſtead of being a deduction from theſe, it will be a deduction from the articles, for which the merchant or manufacturer uſed to exchange his profits, the demand for which being thus decreaſed, their production, which is neceſſarily proportioned to the demand, will be decreaſed likewiſe. The tax therefore is only transfered from one claſs of productions to another. If however the articles, for which the merchant uſed to exchange his ſuperfluous profits, were foreign luxuries, the decreaſe of produce will not be in the country where the tax is impoſed, but in the country which ſupplied thoſe luxuries. This is perhaps the only inſtance, in which a tax impoſed on one country, is paid from the produce of another. If the merchant or manufacturer does not pay the tax by leſſening his own profits, but by encreaſing his price, the tax falls directly upon the conſumer, who muſt leſſen his conſumption of the articles

taxed, or of others leſs important to him; the demand for which, and of courſe the production will be thus decreaſed, unleſs new demands are created by opening new ſources of foreign commerce.

A manufacturer, who ſells the produce of his labour at the higheſt price, and in the greateſt quantity poſſible, and can yet but barely maintain himſelf, muſt, when any additional tax is laid either upon the articles of his manufacture or conſumption, be rendered unable to maintain himſelf. If the tax be upon the produce of his manufacture, he muſt either increaſe the quantity or the price, in order to pay it: if it falls upon the articles of his conſumption, he muſt either decreaſe the quantity conſumed, or increaſe the price of his labour: but if his conſumption was before as little, and his induſtry as great as poſſible; and the price of his labour as high as the demand for its produce would admit, he will be abſolutely unable to pay the tax, and muſt of courſe abandon his employment. He will henceforth be a burden inſtead of a ſupport to his country, and unleſs new ſources of commerce are opened, or new

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means of employment created, the ſooner he emigrates the better.

The public intereſt being merely the aggregate of different private intereſts, every individual, whoſe employment is profitable to himſelf without being injurous to others, is of uſe to the ſtate; but at the moment his employment ceaſes to be more profitable to himſelf than injurous to others, he ceaſes to be of uſe to the ſtate. As the profit of employments in manufacturing countries uſually depends upon local ſituation and connexions, there can be no danger of peoples emigrating while their continuance would be beneficial, for notwithſtanding any particular inſtances of reſtleſſneſs or caprice the bulk of mankind will never quit comfort and ſecurity, for the danger and uncertainty, which muſt neceſſarily attend a change of country. To endeavour therefore to increaſe the inhabitants of a country beyond the number which its uſeful employments require, and which the private intereſts of individuals will amply ſupply, is as abſurd as to endeavour to increaſe the quantity of current ſpecie beyond what the common courſe of circula-

tion requires, which, could it be accompliſhed, would anſwer no other end than that of decreaſing its comparative value.

A ſtate may be overſtocked with inhabitants as well as underſtocked. Long peace, liberty and internal proſperity will naturally have this effect, for they will multiply the people in greater proportion than the materials of productive labour; and every country that has more inhabitants than it can uſefully employ, may properly be ſaid to be overſtocked, for the idle are of no uſe and conſequently a burden. Such a country is like a human body grown fat and unwieldy by indolence and indulgence: ſtrong exertions will have the ſame effect upon the one, as ſtrong exerciſe upon the other: every ſuperfluous incumbrance will be worked off, and while its bulk is diminiſhed, its force will be increaſed. But if theſe exertions are continued too long, or are greater than the natural ſtrength of the ſtate can bear, they are like exceſſive labour, which weakens and emaciates the body. In this caſe depopulation is not ſo much an evil in itſelf as the conſequence of a preceeding evil, which would otherwiſe have produced worſe calamities.

mities. It may juſtly be compared to thoſe chronical diſeaſes produced by intemperance, which however grievous and painful in themſelves, are nevertheleſs preſervatives from others more pernicious and deſtructive.

Since the appearance of Mandeville's books there is ſcarcely any axiom in politics more generally received, than that luxury (by which I mean all unneceſſary conſumption) is beneficial to a ſtate. By increaſing the conſumption we are ſaid to increaſe the demands, and to add incentives to induſtry and ingenuity. The number and activity of our manufacturers are thus augmented, and a rapid increaſe of wealth and power is the neceſſary conſequence.

But before we adopt this concluſion, it ſhould be remembered, that if increaſing the national conſumption be deſirable, not only waſte and profuſion muſt be beneficial, but likewiſe ſtorms and deluges, or any other deſtructive efforts of nature.—The means by which a particular end is obtained, can be of little importance in a political view, provided that end be really obtained; and if a convulſion of nature

ture will produce the ſame effects, as an irregular indulgence of appetite or fancy, it muſt be equally beneficial. If private vices and local calamities operate in an equal degree to the ſame end, that end muſt be equally good or equally bad, whatever be its efficient cauſe. But in this, as in many other inſtances, men have run into error, by not diſtinguiſhing remote and contingent, from immediate and efficient cauſes; a diſtinction which may perhaps appear ſubtile and frivolous at firſt, but which when attentively examined, will be found of great importance; for it frequently happens that the ſame thing may be the remote and contingent cauſe of a benefit, which, in its more immediate and general effects, is pernicious. Of this kind I will endeavour to prove the ſubject in queſtion to be.

The conſtitution of human nature is ſuch, that its faculties are never rouſed, nor its activity exerted, but to remove the painful ſenſation of ſome want, which want muſt ariſe from a preconceived idea of its object. As all ideas are acquired by experience, no one can have an idea of an object, which he is not previouſly made acquainted

acquainted by means of ſome organ of ſenſe. he may feel the pain of want when deprived of things neceſſary to his exiſtence, but he can have no ſpecific idea of the objects proper to relieve that want, but from experience; as we ſee in young children, who when they feel the pain of hunger, apply every thing indiſcriminately to their mouths. As men in the rude ſtate of nature can have few ideas, they can have few wants, and of courſe few motives to exert their induſtry or ingenuity. All the pleaſures which they know are already in their power, and they can have no wiſh for others, which they never taſted, and of which they can have no conception. Introduce new objects of gratification, and you give them new ideas of happineſs, and create new wants, to remove which all the latent faculties of the mind and body will be called into uſe. Here the influence of luxury is certainly beneficial, as by rouſing and expanding the activity of the mind, it is the remote cauſe of multiplying and varying the productions of art and labour, but when, in its more immediate operations, it increaſes the home conſumption of thoſe prductions, in a coun-

try where arts are already firmly eſtabliſhed, it is as certainly hurtful; for whatever part of thoſe introductions is conſumed in uſeleſs expences at home, is of no more advantage to the ſtate, than if it had never exiſted. It may indeed be not improperly called a loſs to the ſtate, for the labour employed in producing it, might have been employed upon objects of real utility to the community. In the infancy therefore of arts and commerce, the introduction of luxury might have been of uſe in aiding and accelerating their progreſs, but when they are once eſtabliſhed, its continuance and increaſe muſt be hurtful. If that part of a great man's income, which he ſpends in coſtly liveries, magnificent equipages, and foreign luxuries, were paid into the public treaſury, and employed in augmenting the number of ſhips and ſeamen, there is no doubt but it would be of much more public utility. A ſtate, where arts and induſtry were united with frugality, might turn all its ſuperfluous produce to the public ſervice, and thereby exert its whole ſtrength, which none of the modern ſtates of Europe can do. This is however a combination, which has ſcarcely ever happened,

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in any government, and which never can happen in a monarchy, where the eſtabliſhed forms and ceremonies, which conſtitute a court, make dreſs, equipage and ſervants, as much the neceſſaries of life, as any articles of natural want; for that without which a man cannot fulfil the duties of his ſtation is to him abſolutely neceſſary.

It will perhaps be objected to my firſt general poſition; that, if the political greatneſs of a ſtate depends upon the quantity of its ſuperfluous wealth, it matters not how that wealth be acquired, whether by force or labor, by foreign conqueſt or internal induſtry. That this however is not the caſe, the examples of Spain and Portugal, beſides many others to be found in hiſtory, are ample proofs.

In order to account for this ſeeming paradox, it will be neceſſary to form an accurate notion of the nature and uſe of money; and to conſider, in what modes and circumſtances, an increaſe of its quantity may be beneficial, and in what hurtful to a ſtate.

Money is the univerſal merchandize, for which all others are given or received in exchange. Whether it is made of gold, ſilver,

copper, or paper, matters not provided, it is generally, and freely acknowledged, and accepted, as the vehicle, repreſentative, or ſtandard of value to every thing elſe. Price or value, either in the natural, or artificial neceſſaries of life, is a relation of quantity between the univerſal, and each particular ſort of merchandize. If we increaſe the quantity of any particular commodity without increaſing the quantity of money, that commodity will become cheaper, and if the contrary, dearer. If it becomes ſo cheap that the merchant cannot gain his neceſſary profit, he carries a part of it to ſome foreign market, and exchanges it either for the univerſal merchandize, or for ſuch particular commodities as abound more in that country, than in his own. When the exports of a country are exchanged for money, that country becomes ſuddenly rich, or increaſes the comparative quantity of its univerſal merchandize. The immediate conſequence of this is an increaſe of price in each particular merchandize, which, were it to become exceſſive, would drive the conſumers to foreign markets, and trade would thus periſh by the exceſs of its own profits.

But

But the natural temper of man, whoſe deſires always expand themſelves in proportion to the opportunities of gratifying them, muſt ever prevent this from happening. The merchant, into whoſe hands the money firſt comes, endeavours to make it productive, and lays it out to increaſe his capital in trade, that is, the quantity of thoſe particular commodities, which he uſes in the courſe of exchange. If he manufactures them himſelf he increaſes the number of his workmen, by offering greater wages, if he buys them, the manufacturer who ſells does the ſame. Laborers will flock from other countries where the profits of labor were leſs, provided they can enjoy the fruits of it with equal eaſe and ſecurity. This increaſe of population rouſes the activity of the huſbandman, by offering him a readier ſale for the produce of his land, he improves his cultivation, and acquires a ſuperfluity of the neceſſaries of life in order to exchange them for the implements of eaſe and luxury, which can only be produced by the ſkill and induſtry of the manufacturer. Thus as long as wealth is increaſed by trade, or in other words, as long as the quantity

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of the univerſal merchandize is increaſed by the particular, the comparative quantities of each can never ſuffer any continued variation; and conſequently the price of every article muſt, upon an average, continue nearly the ſame. Every addition to the quantity of productive ſtock will create new demands for labor, and add new ſpurs to induſtry and ingenuity. The annual produce of the nation and of courſe its power will be thus rapidly increaſed.

Such are the effects of money brought into a country by commerce, but when acquired by foreign conqueſts, and paid in tribute to the public treaſury, its influence is totally different. The quantity of univerſal merchandize, being violently and ſuddenly increaſed, the price of every commodity is raiſed. Productive labor is not increaſed with it, conſequently its comparative quantity is leſſened. Hence thoſe nations, whoſe comparative quantity of induſtry is greater, are enabled to underſell them. Their own people become idle by habit, while thoſe, who ſupply them, become inured to labor. Thus their internal produce gradually diminiſhes, until at length they

they become dependent upon other nations, even for the neceſſaries of life, and are obliged to ſubmit to whatever exactions are impoſed upon them. The violent torrent of their wealth being poured in by ſudden conqueſt, and not finding any channel prepared to receive it, overflows and lays waſte the country, while the gentler ſtream of commerce works its way by degrees, and inſinuates itſelf imperceptibly into every part of the community, giving life and vigor to whatever it approaches.

There may however be caſes, in which conqueſts are not hurtful, as when they are ſo ſituated, as to be incorporated, and united with the conquerors, or when the latter can increaſe their own internal ſtrength, and greatneſs in proportion to the conqueſts they make. Such conqueſts muſt neceſſarily be ſlow and gradual, ſo that the conquering ſtate may have time to expand itſelf to the extent of its exertions, and to acquire ſtrength and magnitude proportioned to the ſpace which it is to occupy. Of this kind were the conqueſts, of the Romans, who may more properly be ſaid to have ſwelled a ſmall republic into a great empire, than to have acquired great poſſeſſions. By

planting

planting colonies, and gradually introducing their own language, laws, and manners, theſe politic invaders contrived to unite the conquered countries ſo firmly to their own body, that they became in a ſhort time members of it, bound together by the ſtrong ties of reciprocal intereſt and mutual dependence. The ſame wiſe ſyſtem has been adopted by the French in their German and Flemiſh acquiſitions, which have therefore been permanent and beneficial to them. The Spaniſh ſyſtem was of a different kind, *divide* and *govern*, has been the favourite maxim of this court, and by a ſtrict adherence to it, their vaſt poſſeſſions became unwieldy incumbrances which ſerved only to ſink and oppreſs them. Philip II. left an empire more extenſive and (if gold and ſilver were wealth) more rich than any that ever had exiſted; yet his immediate ſucceſſors were ſo poor and weak as to aſk the protection of a little republic, which a few years before was one of their own deſpiſed and inſulted provinces.

The government of the Britiſh conqueſts in America and the Weſt-Indies might ſerve as a model of wiſdom, juſtice and moderation

tion, before the change, that took place at the beginning of the preſent reign. A reciprocal demand for each others productions had created a mutual dependence, founded on mutual advantage, and therefore likely to be permanent. The mother country furniſhed the colonies with the implements of labor, and means of induſtry, and received the materials of it in return. The activity of both countries was thus increaſed and the firmeſt bond of union, that of mutual intereſt eſtabliſhed. But early in the preſent reign a new ſyſtem was adopted, and the colonies were no longer to be conſidered as the conſtituent parts of a great empire, governed by the ſame laws, and intitled to the ſame privileges with the reſt; but as dependent tributary provinces, ſubject in all things to the will of their poſſeſſors. Had this ſyſtem been carried ſucceſsfully into execution, there is no doubt but it would have had the ſame effects upon England as it has had upon Spain, and which it muſt neceſſarily have upon the commerce and induſtry of every country.

Taxes have ſo great an influence upon population, that I look upon it to be a neceſ-

ſary part of the ſubject in queſtion, to examine their nature and effects.

All taxes being deductions from the national produce, except in the inſtance already mentioned, they muſt fall either upon the internal, or external conſumption, which muſt be decreaſed in proportion to the greatneſs of the tax. If they fall upon the internal conſumption, there muſt either be a reduction in the expences of the rich, or a decreaſe of population, unleſs there be an increaſe of produce equal to the amount of the tax. If they fall upon the external conſumption, there will neceſſarily be a decreaſe in the ſuperfluous produce, which chiefly ariſes from the profits of exports; and though all taxes are ultimately paid from that produce, yet by taking them at the ſource, we take away the productive principle with them, and while we endeavour only to gather the fruit, deſtroy the tree. It has therefore been the policy of the wiſeſt among the modern nations to tax the former in preference to the latter, a decreaſe of population being at all events much leſs to be dreaded, than a decreaſe of produce. Where however there is a great

internal

internal conſumption, more than is neceſſary to the welfare of the inhabitants, the articles of that are the moſt proper ſubject for taxation; ſince the tax in this caſe is only an appropriation to the public ſervice of what would otherwiſe be conſumed in private profuſion. It is indeed difficult, and almoſt impoſſible to diſtinguiſh the articles of internal from thoſe of external conſumption, unleſs the tax can be levied immediately upon the conſumer. Where this can be done it is much leſs burdenſome to individuals, as well as more beneficial to the public; for every perſon through whoſe hand the articles taxed paſs, in going from the manufacturer to the conſumer, exacts a profit, not only from the articles conſumed, but from the tax likewiſe. All taxes upon fixed revenues above a certain value may be properly ſaid to fall immediately upon the unneceſſary internal conſumption. Of this kind is the land-tax, when it conſiſts of a certain portion of the fixed rents, and not of the variable produce of the land; and does not deſcend to eſtates under a certain value. The rent paid by the tenant to the landlord is in itſelf a kind of tax drawn by one ſet

of men from the ſuperfluous profits of the labor of another, and, in a political light, differs little from thoſe unproductive revenues, which the pernicious practice of funding has drawn from the profits of induſtry and frugality, to feed idleneſs and luxury. Any tax upon it therefore is only applying part of a ſuperfluous profit, generally employed in uſeleſs ſuperfluities, to the public ſervice. This tax, like all others, will decreaſe the demand for the articles in which it was before expended, and of courſe the number of manufacturers employed in fabricating thoſe articles; but provided it be not ſo exceſſive as to make the proprietors of land mere ſtewards for the public; and alſo that proper ſecurity be given them, that it ſhall not be increaſed upon any improvements which they might make in their eſtates, it can be of no public detriment, as it will not diminiſh the comparative quantity of the national produce. The decreaſe of population will be no ſort of injury to the ſtate, as it will be merely of perſons employed in unneceſſary articles of internal conſumption, who, politically conſidered, are no better than cyphers. To what

extent

extent a land-tax may be carried, without becoming ruinous to a country, is difficult to determine. We have an *inſtance in Europe, of the lands of individuals paying one fourth of their actual rents, and thoſe of † corporations one half, which, conſidering the incidental expences neceſſary to landed property, is perhaps as much as can be exacted ‡.

An ingenious political theoriſt*, has indeed found out another ſcheme of taxation, which, were it not impracticable, would render public reſources infinitely greater than they can be according to the methods commonly purſued. He has eſtimated the wealth of a ſtate, by adding to its current ſpecie, and productive ſtock, the value of the whole landed property computed at ſo many years purchaſe; and has propoſed taxing this aggregate capital upon great emergences. But the value of land conſiſt-

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* Pruſſia.

† Monaſteries in Sileſia.

‡ The Dewanna of Bengal indeed is much greater, being a general appropriation of the rents of land to the ſtate, but its effects ſhould rather deter than invite imitation.

* See Mr. Pultney's Pamphlet upon the Supplies, &c.

ing

ing wholly in its productions, and theſe productions being periodical, it is impoſſible to conſolidate them into one aggregate capital, unleſs a wheat-field could be made to bear the crops of twenty-five years in one. The rent paid for a certain quantity of land is a deduction from the produce drawn from it by the labour of the huſbandman in a given time. The tax upon it is a deduction from that deduction, but neither the one or the other of them can poſſibly exiſt, until the original produce, from which both are deducted has exiſted. When we ſay, that land is worth twenty-five years purchaſe, we mean, that the quantity of it to be diſpoſed of, bears ſuch a particular proportion to the quantity of money to be diſpoſed of. If that proportionate quantity increaſes, the price is lowered; if decreaſed, raiſed; but if the whole landed property of England were to come to market, it would not yield much more than one years purchaſe, for I do not believe, that the quantity of gold and ſilver in the kingdom is much more than ſufficient to repreſent one years produce, without appearing in circulation more than once. To

attempt

attempt therefore to make an aggregate capital of the whole value of the lands in a ſtate, is juſt as abſurd as a perſon's attempting to collect the whole quantity of mechanic force exerted by him during twenty-five years into the effort of a moment.

As the fixed rents of land are the beſt ſubjects for taxation, ſo are its variable productions the worſt. If the huſbandman is to pay a part of every increaſe of produce, which his induſtry or ingenuity procures, to thoſe who have had no ſhare in the labour or expence of it, he will of courſe be leſs eager and active in producing; the tax abſorbing, or (as generally happens) anticipating the profits of his induſtry, it not only checks its efforts, but renders its pro-productive powers vain and fruitleſs. I obſerved laſt year * great quantities of hops left to rot upon the poles, merely becauſe the planters could not afford to pay the exciſe; which, if there had been no tax upon them, would have been ſold to foreign markets, and thus have added to the public ſtock.

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* 1781.

But

But of all taxes, none are ſo deſtructive in this way as tithes in kind. They not only give the idle a power over the productions of the induſtrious, but check and diſcourage induſtry in its moſt important and beneficial exertions, the producing of thoſe articles immediately neceſſary to the exiſtence of man. Other taxes drink up the ſtream of national wealth, but this dries up the fountain.

It will always be a ſubject of wonder to the unprejudiced part of mankind, that a bill ſo generally beneficial as that for the commutation of tithes ſhould have met with ſo much oppoſition; and ſtill more, that this oppoſition ſhould have ariſen from one of the moſt liberal minded, as well as the moſt able men of the age, who had no ſort of perſonal or party intereſt in the queſtion. The objection of ſo much land lying in mortmain, if it be ſerious, can have no other grounds than profeſſional prejudice, a kind of prejudice which is apt to be ſtrongeſt in the ſtrongeſt minds. The produce of the land is all that the public have any concern in, the rent being merely a tax paid by the producers to the conſumers,

who

who, whether they are appointed by will, inheritance or election, are equally unimportant. Whether the rent of a farm be paid to a ſucceſſion of individuals of the ſame or of different profeſſions, can make no difference to the public, provided there be no reſtrictions on its productive powers, but full liberty be given to the active avidity of the cultivator. Whether the landlord be abſolute proprietor, or only tenant for life, it is equally his intereſt to make his land productive, and conſequently to be uſeful to the public. Nothing but ſuperfluity will ever make the generality of mankind inattentive to intereſt, and of courſe nothing but great monopolies will prevent cultivation, where the profits of it are free. A clergyman, who has only 500 acres of land to maintain himſelf and family, will naturally endeavour to make every part of it as profitable as poſſible though he has not the appointment of his ſucceſſor; but a nobleman who has 50,000 at his own diſpoſal, will readily ſacrifice 1000 in parks and pleaſure grounds, which is thereby rendered totally uſeleſs to the public. Granting however, that land lying in mortmain be a public evil, it is

ſurely better that the evil ſhould fall upon the ſubject of induſtry, which it does not intrinſically affect, than upon induſtry itſelf whoſe very being it affects. If there is an inert diſeaſe engrafted on our conſtitution, it is ſurely better that it ſhould deſtroy the functions of a limb, which is only the inſtrument of animal motion, than that it ſhould benumb, the vital principle and general ſource of all activity.

But there is another objection urged with more appearance of validity, that is, the withdrawing the attention of the clergy from the ſacred duties of the church, by the care and trouble which attend the management of landed property. If the clergy were indeed what the pure imagination of a pious man, unacquainted with the world might ſuppoſe them, there would be little to be ſaid againſt this objection, but in their preſent ſtate, which ſome may call corrupt, but which is nevertheleſs no other than the neceſſary reſult of the relation in which they ſtand to the other parts of the community; in this ſtate I ſay, every unprejudiced friend to religion muſt wiſh, that they had ſome innocent and uſeful em-

ployment,

ployment, in which they might employ their leiſure hours, and to which they might bring up their families. Men who have had the education of gentlemen, and who hold the rank which the clergy ought to hold in ſociety, have generally too much pride, or more properly ſpeaking, too much delicacy to put their children to ſervice, or to any of the lower claſſes of trade; and this pride or delicacy generally prevents them from ſaving enough out of their incomes to procure them any more creditable employments; hence the diſtreſs which the families of the clergy ſo frequently ſuffer, and which generally ends in making the males vagabonds, and the females proſtitutes.

Of all gainful employments, there is none ſo creditable, ſo innocent, and ſo uſeful as agriculture. All that is gained by it, is clear gain to the community, and to human nature, for it is not like many other lucrative trades that impoveriſh one community to enrich another. The improvers of agriculture are what the clergy ought to be according to their divine inſtitution, the general friends and benefactors of mankind,

the true imitators of God, who aſſiſt in multiplying his bounties, in giving liberty and force to the productive powers which he has implanted in nature. A clergyman who ſets his pariſhioners an example of cultivation, who aided them in improving their lands, methodizing their induſtry, and regulating their families, would be juſtly regarded as the father of his flock, inſtead of the tyrant and extortioner, which a collector of tithes muſt neceſſarily appear. He might alſo ſet them an example of the moral virtues of patience, induſtry, humanity, and moderation in the exerciſe of their own profeſſion, which a perſon of ſpeculative life could not do, for his conduct, be it ever ſo innocent or virtuous, would not be attributed to his poſſeſſing greater virtue on ſelf-command, but to his being expoſed to fewer temptations. The wiſe Apoſtle St. Paul, felt the neceſſity of ſome ſecular employment for the miniſters of the goſpel, and ſtrongly recommended it, both by his precept and example, at a time when the unſettled ſtate of the infant Church made their ſpiritual functions much more difficult and laborious, than at preſent. If when the

the ſmallneſs of their number and the wide diſperſion of the faithful kept them almoſt continually travelling, it was thought neceſſary that they ſhould exerciſe ſome ſecular buſineſs for the employment of their leiſure hours, and maintenance of their families, how much more neceſſary muſt it be now, when their fixt reſidence, and confined miniſtry muſt afford them ſo much more leiſure, and when the mode, in which their families are educated, makes them ſo much leſs capable of maintaining themſelves.

It has been objected by ſome zealous ſupporters of ſanctified prejudices, that by giving the clergy a diſtinct and independent property, we ſhould break that unity and mutual dependence which ought to ſubſiſt between church and ſtate. But will any one ſeriouſly aſſert that tithes tend to promote or preſerve this unity? are they not on the contrary the perpetual ſubject of quarrels and diſputes; and the principal, if not the only cauſe why the clergy are held in ſuch general deteſtation and contempt among the lower orders of the people? and is not this deteſtation and contempt of the clergy the principal cauſe of their contempt of religion

ligion and morality? as for the church poſſeſſing a diſtinct independant property, it is an objection which the advocates of hierarchy never thought of making, when any ſuch property was to be acquired without giving up an equivalent.

The divine right, by which tithes were formerly claimed, is I believe now generally abandoned. However, if any perſon ſhould have ſcruples on that head, they ſhould recollect that the Jewiſh law-giver firſt eſtabliſhed * them for a nation of wandering ſhepherds, who were almoſt ſtrangers to cultivation and whoſe principal wealth conſiſted in flocks. To ſuch a people the payment of tithes muſt be much leſs burdenſome than to one, which has made any conſiderbale progreſs in the arts of productive induſtry. A Highlander or Swiſs, who was to give the tenth of his flock, would pay a much lighter tax than a Fleming or an Engliſhman who was to give the tenth of his corn; becauſe the proportionate quantity of labor

* They were firſt inſtituted in Egypt or ſome parts of Aſia, but the claim of the church is founded on the authority of Moſes.

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employed in producing the latter is much greater than in producing the former. Tithes therefore, as now paid, are a much heavier tax than intended by the inſtituter, even without including any rare and coſtly fruits, which ſome late diciſions have made ſubject to them, though they might juſt as reaſonably have made coal, iron, copper, or any other articles extracted from the earth by human induſtry titheable.

Thus is this odious tax equally ruinous and oppreſſive in whatever point of view we conſider it. Politically, it is deſtructive to the wealth and power of the country; morally, it promotes enmity and diſſention, and of courſe fraud, rancor, and malice; religiouſly, it baniſhes all piety, meekneſs and charitableneſs, and preſents thoſe, who ought to appear as the diſintereſted miniſters of peace and righteouſneſs, in the odious characters of tax gatherers.

Whence then proceeds the oppoſition to aboliſhing it? is it from a love of power or a love of miſchief, or from both? the power which it gives is ſuch as few men will dare to avow a love for, though many feel it, it is the power of harraſſing and tormenting,

which,

which, I fear, many wiſh to poſſeſs, even among thoſe who do not feel a pleaſure in uſing it. But the clergy need not fear a loſs of their temporal power, if they were to abandon this odious and pernicious means of preſerving it. They who only kept up the appearances of ſanctity and integrity, might ſtill gratify their intereſt or ambition by making as many votes at elections by the mild influence of a good character, as they do now by all the terrors of tyranny and extortion.

The exceſſive taxes paid by England and Holland during times of encreaſing ſplendor, proſperity and power, have induced ſome ſpeculators to imagine that every new tax produces a new ability in the ſubject to pay it. This notion is however now generally exploded, and is treated by the moſt accurate and ingenious writer* upon this ſubject, as too abſurd to merit a ſerious confutation. At firſt view it appeared to me in the ſame light, but upon more attentive examination I have in ſome degree altered my opinion. Every

* Hume's Eaſſy on public credit.

tax

tax that decreaſes the conſumption without decreaſing the produce of a ſtate, occaſions an increaſe of the ſuperfluous produce, a part or the whole of which becomes the means of paying that tax. This muſt neceſſarily be the conſequence of all taxes that fall upon the internal conſumption, which, as before obſerved, muſt either be paid by a deduction from the ſuperfluous expences of the rich, or from the neceſſary ſubſiſtence of the poor—in the former caſe they muſt produce a retrenchment of expence, and in the latter a decreaſe of population, both of which occaſion a decreaſe of internal conſumption, and of courſe an increaſe of ſuperfluity, in which conſiſts the real ability of paying taxes*. In arguing thus, I am ſuppoſing a country where commerce is free and the means of exportation eaſy, ſo that the ſuperfluous produce may be carried to

* If all the taxes now paid by England had been impoſed at one time, though in the moſt flouriſhing period of our hiſtory, the country would have been unable to pay them. The ability of paying muſt therefore have increaſed with the increaſe of taxes.

foreign markets, and exchanged for money, or other merchandize in which the tax is paid. Where this is not the caſe a decreaſe of conſumption will occaſion a decreaſe of produce, and every tax will have the effect of tithes in kind. A ſuperfluity which cannot be exported will only be a temporary abundance, which after having introduced habits of waſte and idleneſs, will ceaſe of itſelf, for the produce of all kinds of induſtry will always be proportioned to the demands for it, and if that demand is confined to the home conſumption, the produce will be no more than ſufficient to ſatisfy it. I have alſo ſuppoſed a country where arts and induſtry are improving, as they have been for two centuries paſt in every part of Europe, except Spain, Portugal and Italy. Were it otherwiſe, every new tax would rather deſtroy than create an ability in the ſubject to pay it; for if productive art and induſtry were not increaſed, every tax upon internal conſumption muſt decreaſe population, and every decreaſe of population would be accompanied with a decreaſe of produce, unleſs the improvements made in productive labor were ſuch as enabled a ſmaller number

to

to produce as much as a greater produced before. Where taxes increaſe faſter than improvements, which I fear has been lately the caſe in England, they not only abſorbe the national produce, but weaken the power of producing by raiſing the price and leſſening the profits* of productive labor, or what is worſe decreaſing the demand for all articles of export. The variations which have lately taken place in two important branches of manufacture will explain this matter very clearly. Glaſs and ſugar in their raw ſtate have been heavily taxed during the preſent war, and of courſe the price of each in that ſtate has been conſiderably advanced. But the art of caſting and poliſhing large plates of glaſs having been greatly improved, they are now cheaper than before the material was taxed. The art of refining ſugar on the contrary remaining juſt the ſame, and the price of the raw material being greatly advanced, refined ſugars are become ſo exceſſively dear, as to threaten

* A riſe in the price of the neceſſaries of life, muſt raiſe the price of labor, but this riſe will be as different in its effects as in its cauſes from that occaſioned by an increaſe of demand.

the ruin of the manufactories, by the great decreaſe in the demand.

During the late war our improvements in all kinds of art and induſtry were much more rapid than the accumulation of taxes, and the undiſputed empire of the ſea opened ſo many new and copious ſources of commerce, that the increaſe of price occaſioned by the increaſe of taxes was trivial compared with the vaſt increaſe of demand, which aroſe from that kind of commercial monopoly which we then poſſeſt. The ſpirit of induſtry was ſo general that perſons of all ages and conditions found employment in ſome branches of manufacture, and the parochial taxes were diminiſhed almoſt as faſt as the parliamentary were increaſed. In the preſent war the exact reverſe has happened. Inſtead of opening new ſources of commerce the moſt fruitful of the old ones has been ſtopped. As faſt as taxes increaſe induſtry becomes leſs, and the ſpirit of improvement ſinks. Though three years of uncommon plenty, and the abſence of a great number of people have rendered the neceſſaries of life cheaper, the poor are now more diſtreſſed, and the pariſhes more burdened

burdened than they were ſeven years ago, when there were ſo many more inhabitants* and when there had been a failure of crops for three years together. The demand for workmen then exceeded their number but now their number, though really leſs exceeds the demand.

Inſtead therefore of complaining of a diminution of inhabitants, ſuppoſing ſuch a diminution has happened, we ought rather to rejoice that we have been relieved from a burdenſome ſuperfluity, and to wiſh the diminution more rapid ſince a change of circumſtances has rendered us unable to find employment for thoſe we have. If every perſon maintained by parochial taxes were to emigrate, I believe there is no one will deny that the parliamentary taxes would be leſs burdenſome, of courſe the public more capable of great exertions. This decreaſe of population would of itſelf ceaſe as ſoon as it

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* Vaſt numbers being now employed on foreign ſervices,

ceaſed

ceaſed to be beneficial. As trade recovered, and the demand for labour increaſed, the natural love of gain would ſupply us with inhabitants as faſt as we could profitably employ them; for population, if not confined by artificial obſtructions, will preſerve as exact a level by the attractive power of private intereſt as water does by the attractive power of the earth. There may be local effluxes and influxes of the one as well as the other, but both will return to their natural equilibrium as ſoon as the contingent or periodical cauſes of variation are removed.

Whether England be more or leſs populous now than at the end of the laſt century, I ſhall not pretend to determine, but refer the reader to two well-known treatiſes of two ingenious calculators.* It muſt be remembered, however, that theſe kinds of calculations are at beſt founded in a great meaſure on partial eſtimates and vague conjectures, and therefore not to be implicitly truſted. If the population ofthe king-

* Dr. Price and Mr. Howlet.

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dom was greater at the revolution than at preſent, it muſt neceſſarily have been greater before the civil wars than at the revolution; for the period that intervened was intirely occupied by the deſtructive contentions between the monarchical and popular parts of the conſtitution. Upon this ſuppoſition therefore the population of England muſt have been at its higheſt pitch, during the adminiſtration of the Duke of Buckingham, the moſt inglorious period of our hiſtory, when we were diſtreſſed by the pitiful exertions in favour of Rochelle. Though I readily admit that an increaſe of power is compatible with a decreaſe of numbers, I do not think there are ſufficient reaſons to conclude that this has been the caſe in England. Great and continued exertions and accumulated taxes have undoubtedly prevented the numbers of the people from being ſo great as they would have been, had there been no wars and no taxes; but I am inclined to believe that the vaſt improvements in productive arts and induſtry between the revolution and the year 1774, have not only ſupplied the immenſe demands

mands of wars and taxes, but alſo a great increaſe of internal conſumption, and that the extenſive branches of commerce and additional means of employment which have been diſcovered, have created new demands for workmen, notwithſtanding theſe improvements; which in themſelves tend to diminiſh rather than increaſe population by enabling a ſmaller number of perſons to do the ſame quantity of work which a greater did before, and thus to leſſen the number of the conſumers in proportion to the quantity of the production. The demand for labour will increaſe in a direct ratio with its productive materials, and in an inverſe ratio with its artificial improvements. If therefore the materials increaſe faſter than the improvements, population, which depends in commercial countries on the demand for labor, will increaſe; if the contrary decreaſe. The former, I take to have been the caſe in England, from the civil wars to the year 1774, except, perhaps in the particular inſtance of the conſolidating of farms. A great farm is certainly managed with fewer hands in proportion to its

its extent, than a ſmall one; for a great farmer having neceſſarily a great capital, is enabled to conſtruct machines to aid his labour, and to methodize and direct it in a manner which a little farmer cannot do. He thereby does a greater quantity of work with a ſmaller number of hands, by which population has in certain diſtricts, been certainly diminiſhed, but ſuperfluous produce, the true ſource of greatneſs has been as certainly increaſed. Even population, by the vaſt quantities of land which have lately been brought into cultivation by the encloſing of commons, has perhaps been generally increaſed though locally dimiſhed, for every piece of unproductive land that is rendered productive, becomes an addition to the materials of productive labour, and of courſe increaſes its demand. There is however one real evil attending great farms, as they enable a few people in the inland countries to combine together in producing an artificial ſcarcity, which though only temporary is extremely oppreſſive to the poor. The degree in which it is at preſent felt in England is indeed trifling, but the

extent to which it may be carried, appears from the preſent ſtate of the Compania of Rome. The farms in that fertile and unhealthy plain are from 500 to upwards of 13,000£,* ſterling a year, which gave the farmers ſuch a power of extorting, that the government took the corn trade into their own hands, a remedy which has proved worſe than the diſeaſe.

As for the great and continued exertions of England, ſo far as they have tended to open new ſources of commerce, and to increaſe the quantity of productive employment, they have anſwered the ſame good ends with the internal improvements above mentioned. By preventing a redundant increaſe of ſupernumerary inhabitants, they have rather releived the ſtate from an uſeleſs weight, than diminiſhed its ſtrength, rather given liberty and force to its activity, than con-

* The farm of Montalto was in the year 1776 let for 55,000 Roman crowns a year, amounting according to the common courſe of exchange to about 13,500£. ſterling. Yet it did not employ more than 2,000 people including ſmiths and carpenters, though it conſiſts almoſt wholly of arable.

ſumed its power; but at preſent they begin to fatigue and exhauſt it, as the general decline of induſtry and manufactures but too viſibly proves. The exceſs to which the deluſive ſyſtem of funding is carried, preys upon commerce by the enormous profits which it gives to the public creditors. Before the war, ſix or ſeven *per cent* was thought a ſufficient recompence for the riſk and trouble of trade; but now nine or ten *per cent* is gained without any trouble, by lending to the public. Hence a great part of the wealth which was formerly employed in trade is transfered to the funds, and productive ſtock is thus converted into dead revenue paid by taxes upon the produce of induſtry. Funding therefore in its preſent ruinous exceſs, not only abſorbes the produce, but deſtroys the productive powers of the ſtate, by rendering the materials of productive induſtry the ſupport of idle conſumers, which all ſtock-holders, conſidered merely as ſuch, are. It is an inert diſeaſe which not only deſtroys the functions of the limbs, but waſtes the vitals of the body.

This ſyſtem being of modern invention,* we have no examples in hiſtory to ſhew the extent to which it may be carried, or the effects which the utmoſt exceſs of it may produce. As it has already far exceeded the limits preſcribed by the boldeſt ſpeculative politicians, I ſhall not preſume to gueſs how much farther it may exceed them.†

Of the Effects which great exertions and accumulated taxes have upon population and power, we have very particular inſtances, both in the riſe and fall of the Roman Empire. Livy remarks with ſome aſtoniſhment that thoſe parts of Latium, which in the earlieſt times of the republic, produced ſuch mighty armies ſhould in the time of Auguſtus be inhabited only by a few ſlaves employed by the rich citizens of Rome.‡ Although we admit that the numbers of theſe armies have been greatly exaggerated,

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* The Romans contracted debts during the ſecond Punic War and mortgaged part of the public lands, but the preſent complicated ſyſtem of funding was begun at Venice and perfected in Holland.

† See Hume's Eſſay on public credit.

‡ Servitia Romana abſolitudine vindicant, Liv. L. 6.

we cannot deny them to have been very conſiderable, ſince they reſiſted for ſo long a time the whole force of that ſtate, which ſoon after gave laws to the world. The diminution of inhabitants muſt therefore have been very rapid; but we cannot with any degree of probability ſuppoſe, that the lands were worſe cultivated, when in the neighbourhood of a great and wealthy capital, in a time of general activity and proſperity, than when in the doubtful poſſeſſion of a few clans of wrangling barbarians. But the perfection of arts had rendered fewer cultivators neceſſary, and the continual exertions of the Romans had taken away all who were ſuperfluous. So far the diminution of inhabitants was no diminution of ſtrength, but there was a fundamental vice in the provincial Adminiſtration of the Romans, which made their later exertions deſtructive to produce, as well as population, and which contributed more to the ruin of their Empire, than all the follies, cruelties, and extravagances of their tyrants. This was their mode of taxation by arbitrary aſſeſſments upon the annual productions of land and induſtry, by which they not only impeded

impeded all kinds of improvement, but placed a diſcretionary power in the hands of the revenue officers,* a ſet of men of all others the moſt likely to abuſe it. The very nature of their office rendering them odious, they would of courſe be very little ſolicitous about deſerving eſteem, which they were ſure never to obtain; and it is a well known truth, that where laws are deficient, the deſire of eſteem, and the fear of hatred and contempt, are the only effectual ties upon the paſſions. The Roman taxes were frequently collected in kind, and appear exceſſive even in the preſent age. That impoſed by the republic on Sicily, was a general tithe of the annual productions of the earth, which upon great emergencies was doubled.† One fifth of the annual produce of land is at leaſt equal in value to one half of the rent, which I believe cannot be fairly eſtimated at more than one third of the real produce, two thirds being the

* Cicero Verrin 3. Gibbon C. 17.

† Liv. l. 36. C. 2. Livy only ſays of corn *frumenti*, but this included the whole produce of the South part of the iſland, which is ſo totally void of paſture, that in the ſummer the horſes kept for tillage are fed with the leaves and fruit of the carrubi-tree.

proper

proper allowance for the intereſt of ſtock, expences of cultivation, and profits of the cultivator. Conſidered as to its effects upon the ſubject, it is more oppreſſive and burdenſome, whether collected by aſſeſſment or in kind, than any tax upon a determined invariable rent can be; becauſe when the ſum to be paid is fixed and immutable, every increaſe of produce, which any extraordinary exertions of ſkill or induſtry might procure, is ſo much clear profit to the producer; but when the tax is varied with the produce, every extraordinary exertion will be followed by an extraordinary exaction, which will perhaps abſorbe all the profits that had been the motive, and ought to be the reward of extraordinary induſtry.

The purpoſe to which a part of the Roman taxes were applied rendered them as pernicious to the dominant, as they were oppreſſive to the ſubject country. During the later times of the republic, the diſtribution of corn among the people was a ſpecies of bribery conſtantly practiſed by the ambitious candidates for the popular favour. Habit had rendered it ſo neceſſary that the firſt emperors, whoſe policy was to veil their deſ-

potiſm

potiſm under the forms of a popular government, did not dare to omit it. The oſtentatious vanity of their ſucceſſors not only continued, but increaſed it to ſuch a degree, that the people being ſupplyed with corn from other countries for little or nothing, neglected the cultivation of their own land. Italy was thus rendered unproductive by a ſuperfluity, which at the ſame time ruined and depopulated the countries from which it was exacted. We have no certain accounts of the progreſs of this ruin, but from the ſtate of the Empire in the third and fourth century, it appears to have been very rapid. The vaſt colonies of Barbarians received into different parts of it during that period prove that there were immenſe tracts of country unpeopled; and we find that in the beginning of the reign of Arcadius and Honorius before Italy had been invaded by Barbarians, three hundred and thirty thouſand acres of the rich and fertile province of Compania amounting to one eighth of its whole ſurface, were exempted from taxation, as being deſert and abandoned.*

* Gibbon, C. 17.

FINIS.